

## Fall of Tenochtitlan

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I remember the morning I awoke. I gave the man who found me confused looks for what seemed like hours. “Fifteen twenty-one,” I said, quietly surprised. Earlier that day I had gone to school. We had coincidentally been learning about the Aztec empire all week. Things about their architecture, culture, and how it ended due to a massacre led by Spaniards. They taught us the Aztec language, Nahuatl. “Xiuhpōhualli, the counting of years,” said my world history teacher. “Ometzontlion caxtolpohualli ommacuilli, Ometzontlion ommacuilpohualli. Thirteen twenty-five to fifteen twenty-one, the beginning and end of the Aztec empire.” intrigued by the language, I wrote things down, memorizing some words on my way back home after all my classes ended. I got home. dropped my backpack on the floor and flopped face-first onto my bed, except I didn't feel the thud of my bed. The soft landing never came. Instead, I fell directly on my chest, on dirt floors. The overwhelming heat and humidity took over my body. I was only able to hear the faint humming of some nearby bugs and saw the glare from the sun before it all went black. “Where am I?” I mumbled, still in a half-conscious state. I was finally taking in the oddity of the situation, thinking back to how I had just woken up on the floor after trying to fall onto my bed. I immediately came to my senses. I picked myself up from the floor and looked around to see dirt, sand, and not many plants but big buildings that looked similar to mountains, but seemed artificial, too perfect to be natural—the smell of iron, dust, and smoke filled the air, distracting me from these large structure. Then I heard footsteps. A man wrapped in what seemed to be a towel walked up to me, looking me up and down. “Excuse me, where am I?” I said, pointing

frantically at the floor and our surroundings. “Mēxihco?” responded the man. “Ah, México? Y como llegué a México?” I said, switching languages to what I assumed the man would speak. The man’s face went from confused to concerned in an instant. “Cachopin.” The man said in an alert tone. I’ve heard that word... where have I heard it? “Española?” I replied. “quemá?” the man said. Another word I recognized is “yes”. “No, pero hablo español. Entiendes?” I asked. “Si, topiltzin,” he said. “Que año es?” I said, not expecting another response other than 2024 but since the incident involving my bed I wasn’t sure what was logical anymore. “Xiuhpohualli? Ometzontli on ommacuilpohualli,” said the man. Another sentence I had memorized, just earlier that day. “quince veintiuno?” “quemá.” “How is that possible?” I thought to myself out loud, stepping back, “That explains how the man understands Spanish, Spaniards should be taking over everything right now but how the hell is it 1521?” I wondered. I took another step back before hitting my back on a cold wall. “OW” I exclaimed, rubbing the back of my head before turning around to see what I had just walked into. A wall. The wall in my room.

How was I back? I cautiously walked towards my bed, slowly placing my hand on the comforter. Nothing. “A hallucination?” I thought to myself. Maybe I was just tired and didn’t remember falling asleep. I looked for any proof that it wasn’t a hallucination, that it had actually happened, and I found it. Dirt, dirt on my black shirt. There was no way I could’ve gotten dirt on my shirt from falling onto my freshly washed duvet. I dusted myself off and jumped back onto the edge of my bed, laptop on my thighs. “Fall of Tenochtitlan ” I whispered to myself as I googled it. I found the information I had already memorized from school. Spanish invaders killed off most of the Aztec population and ended the empire using disease and weaponry, I read. Not

wanting to be unprepared in case it happened again, I grabbed some things around the house, to make a homemade carrying bag. A wooden board, cloth, and string. Something often used as a backpack during Aztec times. Beans, grains, and wheat are nutritious, common, and not suspicious. I put them in the bag. I remember reading in class that Aztecs used pieces of axes as money. I snuck downstairs and into the garage, grabbing any old piece of metal I could find. Dropped them in, the fall being cushioned by the grains in the bottom of the bag. A way to get a clean source of water was my next thought. A plastic water bottle? No that'd look out of place. A metal one? No, even worse. Back on my computer, I looked up ways to contain water. A terracotta water jug, something I did have. My parents are from Guadalajara, so they often brought back items like this for decor. Another two things they had brought from Mexico that could be useful would be the beautiful embroidered garment they got me to honor my culture, a huipil, and sandals. Thin sole cactli sandals. I thought to myself, "What else could I use, I can't bring any modern weapons, they'd look too out of place but where could I find something older to protect myself?" Not quite 5 pm yet, the time my history teacher leaves, I ran back to school, trusting him more than the internet.

Out of breath and wondering how I could explain why I was there, my words stumbled. "Hey, I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm just really interested in Aztec history. Do you think you could continue to teach me some things?" I said, still trying to catch my breath. "Uh, yeah! I don't see why not, but know you're making me stay after work." replied my teacher, confused but happy I'm so curious about the subject he's teaching. "Is there anything in particular you'd like to know?" he asked. "Yeah actually! Do you know how Aztecs protected themselves against things like animals or attackers?" I asked. "Yes! I have a replica of a Macuahuitl," he said as he

stood up and walked to a closet on the other side of his classroom. Pulling out what seemed to be a baseball bat. "A wooden club with obsidian blades embedded into the sides, " he explained.

"Do you think I could study it closer at home?" I asked. Not giving him any further explanation.

"Um, It is a weapon and I don't think I'm allowed to give a student anything that could potentially harm them." said my history teacher in a concerned but not disapproving tone. "I mean, it is outside school hours and I'll bring it back as soon as I'm done with it," I replied. "I guess that's fine, just be very careful," he said. He put the Macuahuitl in a wooden box and allowed me to grab it. "Well, that's all for now. See you tomorrow," I said while walking out of his classroom and out of the school. Not being able to run now, I got home around 6 pm. I removed the lid from the wooden box and took out the Macuahuitl, placing it into the backpack making sure none of the other objects were damaged. What's something else I could use? I wondered. I settled on something I could use to start a fire. A lighter wouldn't work. Back on my computer, I researched ways Aztecs started fires and came across a source that claimed they used mirrors and dry natural materials. I reached into my bag and pulled out one of the pieces of metal I had previously put in. I walked up to a small mirror in my room, took the piece of old metal, and shattered the glass. Wrapping the shard in a small piece of cloth and cushioning it with some dead grass I found outside, I placed them in my backpack. "Okay, that's it, for now, I think" I whispered, halfway hoping I would get teleported back. 7 pm came around, Nothing. 8 pm, still nothing. I started to doubt myself and wondered if I had just hallucinated everything and the dirt on my shirt was just there from school. I got up, convinced it was just something made up by my mind, and grabbed the backpack. As soon as I did, everything went black.

I woke up again, in the same place, the same warm sunny weather, the same day I assumed since the man was still there. He looked at me startled. "Regresaste?" the man said, confused. "Quema," I replied, trying to make him feel more comfortable by not talking in the language the people killing his family speak. He did seem more at ease around me the second time I appeared. He even let me ask him a couple of questions about him, where I was, and what was happening. He told me his name was Izel, he had a wife who had passed away due to diseases brought overseas by the Spanish. He knew the area well, he was 26 and had lived in Texcoco his entire life. I told him about myself and tried to explain my situation and how I didn't understand why I was being sent here. I showed him the contents of my backpack and he led me to what seemed like a well to fill up the jug of water. When I stood up, he pointed at my shirt. "Verdad," I said. Putting on the huipil and sandals I had packed, leaving my old clothes folded behind a maguey plant. I carried all the supplies on my back, not knowing how long I'd be there. Izel brought me to his home, made of adobe brick and a straw ceiling. I put my backpack down. The thud from my bag hitting the mud floors wasn't the only sound made. I heard more rustling outside. I grabbed the macuahuitl and walked outside to investigate. "Hay alguien ahí?" I asked, not knowing what else to say. "Española!" I heard a voice say from behind the hut. A man, a lot taller and paler than Izel. "Por fin, alguien de España y no más de esos indios." He yelled. Izel came out of the hut wondering what the speaking was. "Amo," said Izel, stepping back slowly. "Ya sabía que ellos secuestraban a mi gente," said the Spanish man, pulling a long metal blade from his side. Izel, not having a weapon, moved behind his hut, grabbing my macuahitl on the way. I was left completely vulnerable, with no way to defend myself. I thought I was gonna die. The man seemed to understand I wasn't from Spain but had a puzzled look as to why I could speak Spanish so well. but to my surprise, he didn't go for me, he sprinted towards Izel. Izel held

the macuahuitl over his shoulder and swung it towards the non armored Spanish man, slashing his neck open with the obsidian blades. With his jugular cut, the man fell to the ground immediately. Gasping, but not being able to get any air in his lungs due to his esophagus being cut. His attempts to inhale made little to no noise other than a disgusting squelch from his severed vocal cords. Izel dropped the weapon, not hit. I stood there. No words, as the now-dead man spasmed and spewed blood on the dirt. Izel whispered to himself "Amo Cualli. Ma xinechtlapohpolhui Teōtl" Not knowing what that meant, I kept standing there, shocked. Moments later, we walked off, leaving the body there. Wanting to comfort Izel, I put my hand on his shoulder, but I never made contact with his skin. I was back in my room, now sure nothing was a hallucination because the huipil I still had on was caked with the now coagulated blood. I took everything off, cleaned up, and put other clothes on. I walked over to my parent's room, still, no words came out. I tried explaining things but I just couldn't. I dragged myself back to my room and slept. Days went by, I wasn't sent back, weeks, months, nothing.

Then one morning on my way to school, It happened. I stepped out the front door of my house but didn't hit the concrete. It was dirt. Something was different this time though. Things *felt* different. The last two times Izel was there, now knowing a bit more Nahuatl I was able to ask some people walking by for the year. "Dieicies ochenta y uno" "Sixteen eighty-one" I repeated. They spoke in Spanish which I now understood was because of the fall of Tenochtitlan. I visit the temple nearest to where I remember Izel's hut being. There was no indication of him being laid to rest there, but the people living nearby knew all the dead were buried outside that temple in unmarked graves. I spoke to people passing by with both Mesoamerican and European

features. It's much different than the crowds I saw years back. As I walked away from the temple, I walked back out my front door. I haven't been sent back ever since.